

The Reconstruction of Masculinity in China, 1896–1930

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A thesis accepted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

December, 2012

University of Technology, Sydney

Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. M. W.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

December 6, 2012

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the many people who assisted me throughout my journey to complete the work for this PhD project. First of all, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my principal supervisor, Prof. Louise Edwards. She is not just a talented researcher and teacher, but a good supervisor who knows how to encourage students to realize their potential. I think good supervising is like good parenting that needs a balance between protecting the confidence and pushing the children to achieve more. While always paying attention to the merits of my thinking and writing, Louise encouraged me to improve my work by carefully reviewing what I wrote. Throughout the process of my research, she did not provide instant or direct answers but pushed me to think and arrive at my own answers. Besides, she provided a very strong support to the healthiness of my personal life especially when I was physically ill. I am also indebted to my two other supervisors: Prof. Elaine Jeffreys and Dr Andrew Hurley. Their constant support and brilliant comments have improved this project successfully. It was a real pleasure to work with them.

This project had been financially supported by Australian government through “Australian Postgraduate Awards” (APA) programme. Also I received institutional support from UTS, especially when I was collecting data in both Australia and China. During my doctoral study, I also published a journal paper (as the second author): “Gender and the Virtue of Violence: Creating a New Vision of Political Engagement through the 1911 Revolution”, in *Frontiers: History in China*, 6.4 (2011), which gave me valuable experience in academic writing.

I am very appreciative and grateful to Prof. Louise Edwards for her help in language translation. However any mistakes in them are my own. Also I have received valuable editorial help from Prof. Louise Edwards, Prof. Elaine Jeffreys and Dr Andrew Hurley.

As a person who has experienced special difficulties in my personal life, I received important administrative support from staff at UTS, especially Dr Jingqing Yang, Ms Ming Liang and Ms Claire Moore. Their patience and excellent administrative skills smoothed my way towards the completion of this project. I would like to express my gratitude here.

Moreover, I want to express my gratitude to my friends—Yin, Ying, Hai, Shengming, Jing, Dan, Xiyi, Mark, Sharon, Vince, and Sid, who made my life pleasant in Newcastle. You are the Karma that I met in Newcastle and want to share the good and bad stories with you for my whole life.

I also appreciate all the support and understandings I received from my family: Wenxiong, Robin, Hong, Ling and my parents. I can't find words to express my gratitude to you as you have given me so much encouragement and care when I experienced the hardships of life. Especially I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Wenxiong: without your patience, care and tolerance, I cannot imagine the completion of this work.

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Abstract

Despite the burgeoning interest in Chinese masculinity, relatively little is known about the social configuration of Chinese manhood in the late Qing and the early Republican era. The overarching purpose of this project is to fill this gap by investigating the impact of nationalism, democratization and globalization on the self-perception of a particular group of men—modern male Chinese scholars. Guided by Connell's gender theory and Louie and Edwards' *wen/wu* paradigm of Chinese masculinity, this study explores how the meaning of male identities was negotiated at a transitional and crisis time when the traditional masculinity of the elite Chinese men was gazed at, challenged, and measured by the formidable western and Japanese powers. This work contributes to empirical research in the areas of gender, identity and social change.

Findings deriving from this study show that the self-perception of this group of men changed dramatically after the defeat of China in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War. Both Nationalism and democratization became drivers for seeking better or stronger manhood among the male Chinese scholars during this time of crisis. The need for national salvation and democracy brought about an array of changes to the standards of what constituted a good man: the image of the pale-faced scholar was replaced by the brawny male ideal that plays modern sports and undertakes military drills; the textual Confucian masculinity was supplanted by a modern masculinity that stressed a connection between male cerebral power and the practical world; the exercise of male sexual power over concubines, prostitutes and catamites was substituted by a claim of male chastity through cultivating exclusive conjugal love; the traditional image of a pious son was replaced by the icon of an autonomous son who seeks economic independence and free-choice marriage from the old joint family; and so on. The findings of this study reveal the *wen/wu* model of Chinese masculinity was subject to social change yet showed flexibility to the impact of these social/historical circumstances.

